

NORTH AMERICAN

WETLANDS

CONSERVATION ACT

# project flash

## Illinois Partnership Receives \$49,993 for Wetlands Project

On June 9, 2004, the North American Wetlands Conservation Council reported to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission that it had approved **\$49,993** in funding under the North American Wetlands Conservation Act's Small Grants Program for the **Restoration of Wetlands for Wildlife at Spunky Bottoms Merwin Preserve in Illinois' Brown County in Congressional Districts 18**. The Act is nonregulatory and calls for voluntary partnerships to develop and implement wetlands and associated uplands conservation projects to benefit wildlife. Projects must meet certain biological criteria to be considered for funding, and partners must be able to match the grant request 1:1 with nonfederal funds.

The Nature Conservancy (Conservancy) is pioneering a restoration project at the 2,000-acre Spunky Bottoms Preserve located in the bottomlands along the west side of the Illinois River. The preserve lies between a high bluff, locally known as Spunky Ridge, and the river, and is across from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) Meredosia National Wildlife Refuge. Before Spunky Bottoms fell to the plow in the last century, it was a rich mosaic of bottomland forest, backwater lakes, floodplain wetlands, prairie, and upland forest, all of which sustained a wide array of wildlife. Cut off from the Illinois River and drained, the area now covered by the preserve was altered dramatically, and its numerous aquatic and bird species began to decline.

The preserve's size and ecological significance make it a priority site for restoration efforts on the river. According to the National Research Council, the Illinois River is one of only three functioning large-floodplain river systems remaining in the United States that has sufficient ecological integrity to warrant restoration.

Project partners will restore wetland, prairie, and backwater habitats by planting native seeds and trees, removing invasive species, and restoring natural processes and hydrology. It is part of an integrated approach for the protection of the river that is being implemented by the Conservancy, The Wetlands Initiative, the Service, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The partners will add **\$58,570** to the grant amount to restore approximately 265 acres in the preserve.

Partners' work will benefit **Mississippi Flyway** waterfowl species, such as mallards, northern pintail, and wood ducks as well as other wetland-associated birds. State- and federally listed species, including river otter, Henslow's sparrow, and decurrent false aster, will benefit as well. The project also contributes to the conservation goals of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan's **Upper Mississippi River & Great Lakes Joint Venture**.

For more information about this project, contact Tharran Hobson, The Nature Conservancy, [thobson@tnc.org](mailto:thobson@tnc.org), (309) 547-2730, or Keith Morehouse, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, [keith\\_morehouse@fws.gov](mailto:keith_morehouse@fws.gov), (703) 358-1784.

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